DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 834 CS 010 391

TITLE	Teachers and Independent Reading: Suggestions for the Classroom.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Univ., Urbana. Center for the Study of Reading.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	13p.
AVAILABLE FROM	University of Illinois, P. O. Box 2276 Station A, Champaign, IL 61825-2276 ($1.25 per copy; $15.00 for a set of 15 copies).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Environment; Elementary Education; *Independent Reading; Instructional Materials; Reading Programs; Recreational Reading; *Student Motivation; Supplementary Reading Materials; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Reading Motivation

ABSTRACT

Designed to offer teachers suggestions to make independent reading an integral part of the school day, this pamphlet discusses the following topics: the importance of independent reading; motivating students to read; arranging time for independent reading; setting up the classroom library; and establishing schoolwide reading programs. Lists of recommended reading, selected annotated bibliographies of children's books, and selected anthologies of children's books are appended. (RS)

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SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

TEACHERS AND INDEPENDENT READING

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SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

TEACHERS AND INDEPENDENT READING

"Reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life." BECOMING A NATION OF READERS: The Report of the Commission on Reading

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT READING

Independent reading is sustained reading for information or for pleasure. As a teacher, you are familiar with the many kinds of reading students enjoy on their own such as a favorite novel; an exciting mystery story; the daily newspaper; the latest sports, entertainment, or electronics magazine; or even comic books. You may not be aware, however, that independent silent reading is one of the most important activities for the reading development of students of all ages. Research shows that students who do a lot of reading "on their own" become better readers because independent reading:

- enhances their reading comprehension;
- provides them with a wide range of background knowledge;
- accounts for one-third or more of their vocabulary growth; and
- promotes reading as a *lifelong activity*.

Alarmingly, while independent reading is so important to reading growth, studies show that many students do not read on their own at all. In fact, some students think that reading is something that is done only with school textbooks.

You can help *all* students begin to see independent reading as an *important* activity by allocating classroom time for independent reading; by seeing to it that your classroom contains novels, biographies, children's magazines and newspapers, science and history books, as well as textbooks; and by allowing students opportunities to see their friends, classmates, and teachers immersed in books—in short, by making independent reading an integral part of the scheduled school day.

MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO READ

Students' home backgrounds play a major role in the development of their reading habits. We know, for example, that students who come from homes where books are plentiful and where reading is a frequent and valued activity often read earlier, better, and more than do students from homes where literacy is not valued highly.

However, the school is equally important to the development of lifelong reading habits. Classrooms that are filled with books and that offer students ample opportunities to learn about, read, react to, and share books can have much the same effect on reading habits as book-filled homes. Here are some particularly effective ways you can motivate students to read independently.

Read aloud to your students. Many teachers read aloud to their students as a way of introducing them to books and authors they may enjoy reading on their own. When you read aloud, you can keep your students' attention and help them to become good listeners by doing the following:

- Prepare students for what you will be reading. Discuss the kind of book they will be hearing, talk about its author and illustrator, and introduce the story's main characters, time, and locale.

- Encourage students to react to what you are reading. Allow your students to comment upon the story and illustrations and to discuss their own relevant experiences. Ask occasional questions to check their understanding of the story and of any new vocabulary.
- Let students predict what will happen next. By involving your students in this way, you are likely to generate so much interest in the book that they will ask to read other copies of it themselves or to read other books by the same author or on the same theme or topic.

Reading aloud can be *more* than simply a way of motivating students to read. Reading and rereading patterned, predictable books to young children or poor readers, for example, not only makes these books more familiar, but also helps students pay more attention to the words and sentences that will be repeated in other books they read. Older children can derive similar benefits when they are read to; reading to them from novels, for example, introduces them to various writing styles, new vocabulary words, and a variety of sentence and grammatical structures. Most important, it gets them interested in reading those novels.

Help your students select books to read. Just as they need to learn how to read independently, some students need to learn how to select books. Here are some ways you can help them develop this ability.

- Make personalized suggestions based upon what you know about an individual student's interests.
- Treat book selection as part of the regular reading group activity. After your students read selections in a basal reader or other textbook, recommend other books by the same author or on the same topic or of the same genre.
- Take your students regularly on book-choosing tours of the school library. Talk to them about what you look for when you select your own books for independent

reading. Library tours will help students learn to find books that interest them, and acquaint them with the resources of the library. At least once a year take your students on a field trip to a local public library.

Encourage book sharing. Reading "networks" of classmates, friends, and teachers are important because they allow students to become familiar with a wide range of good books. You can encourage the creation of such informal networks in your classroom by doing the following:

- Allow informal discussions for several minutes after group silent reading.
- Make book sharing sessions a classroom activity once or twice a week ("Let me tell you about a book I just finished reading," or "Has anyone read a good book lately?").

Read it again! Reading a book again improves both reading fluency and comprehension, particularly for younger readers and poor readers. Don't hesitate to tell your students that it is perfectly all right for them to reread their favorite books; they can derive great pleasure and gain new insights from rereading "oldies but goodies."

ARRANGING TIME FOR INDEPENDENT READING

Reading skill will improve significantly if students read silently for an average of ten minutes a day, or at least one hour per week. Some teachers prefer to set aside a short period of time daily for independent reading, while others prefer to use longer, less frequent periods. There is no evidence that one routine is superior to the other. What is important is that every student read independently for *at least one hour per week*, in periods of whatever length and frequency seem most effective to you.

With all the activities you must include in your classroom, finding one hour a week for independent reading may be difficult. It can be done, however, by providing time for independent reading in the following ways:

As an alternative to workbook practice. Independent, silent reading can fulfill many of the same functions as workbook activities—it permits students to practice what they are learning, and it keeps the rest of the class occupied while you meet with a small group of students. A surprising amount of time for independent reading can be freed if workbook assignments are trimmed down to an essential core that gives students sound practice on newly taught concepts and a review of important information.

As an activity during transition times. Identify the longest transition time during the school day and establish that as the one time when everyone (including you) reads a book. Reading should be the only activity permitted during this time.

As part of a whole-class reading program. There is probably no substitute for a whole-class, independent reading period when both students and teachers silently read books of their own choosing. However, be wary of trying to do too much too soon. *Gradually* increase the amount of time students spend on independent reading in the classroom. Start with only five minutes a day and slowly work up to fifteen or twenty minutes a day (or several times a week) over the course of several weeks. *One warning:* Teachers who set aside time during the day for independent reading sometimes do not want students to take books from the room to read at home, fearing that the books will not be available for the next day's independent reading time. Make sure that you continue to encourage students to read at home—and have a procedure for allowing them to carry home books that they want to finish.

As you plan ways to reallocate time in your classroom schedule, please remember that you must pay more than just lip service to independent reading. Telling children that they can read independently when they "finish their work" implies that independent

reading is less important than other classroom activities. It also means that the slowest workers—the very ones who may need the most reading practice—will get the shortest amount of time to read.

SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM LIBRARY

Having books readily available in the classroom is an important way to motivate *all* students to read, but it is an especially important way to introduce reluctant readers to books and libraries.

Creating a classroom library, however, is not always an easy task, especially in times of tight school budgets. Here are some ways you can obtain books for your library.

- Spend discretionary money on books.
- Visit garage sales—they can be veritable gold mines of books for young readers.
- Ask publishers to help you stock your classroom library with books at reduced prices—or for free.
- See if your school library will rotate several sets of twenty-five or so titles through your library.
- Work out book exchange agreements with other teachers who have classroom libraries.
- Solicit the support of your Parent-Teacher Association, community book clubs, and other service groups and organizations in the community.

Regardless of how you acquire books for your library, be sure to let your students participate in the selection of titles. Ask them to recommend particular books or authors or subjects. For additional suggestions, consult annotated bibliographies that contain summaries and sometimes short reviews of books. (A list of selected annotated bibliographies is located at the end of this brochure.)

Choose a specific area of your classroom for the library; then develop a set of clear and simple rules for its operation. Here are some suggestions.

- Set limits on the number of books that can be borrowed and on the length of the borrowing period. Assign two or three students, on a rotating basis, to be library assistants and let them be responsible for such jobs as checking books out and in, issuing overdue book notices, and keeping library shelves in order.
- Establish times when students are allowed to check out and return books. Such times might be at the beginning and end of the school day, before or after lunch, or during periods when the students are assigned independent work. Keep in mind, however, that students should have frequent access to the library.

Your classroom library will be most effective if it is regarded as a springboard to wider reading. Your library is particularly important to students who do not have public library cards and who do not have books at home. By making these students more comfortable with books and library settings, your classroom library may lead them to seek out additional sources of books. You can encourage them further by arranging frequent class trips to the school's library or even to a community library.

Finally, expect that some of your books will get torn or damaged or will disappear into the hands of eager readers, and be prepared to replenish your library on a regular basis.

ESTABLISHING SCHOOLWIDE READING PROGRAMS

Independent reading should not be limited to individual classrooms. In fact, independent reading programs will be most effective if they are implemented on a schoolwide basis.

While individual teachers know best how to encourage their students to read independently, a schoolwide program can reinforce what goes on in the classroom by promoting a general attitude that independent reading is an integral part of learning at all grade levels. Here are a few ways to create and maintain this kind of atmosphere.

- Maintain hallway bulletin boards that focus on reading.
- Make a "chain of reading" composed of strips of construction paper containing the names of books, authors, and readers and display it in the school library.
- Distribute reading certificates at awards day ceremonies at the end of the school year.
- Conduct a "battle of the books" in which students compete by answering questions about books they have read.
- Sign up for community and library programs sponsored by federal and state governments, such as Reading Is Fundamental (RIF).

Finally, extend your independent reading program beyond the school by enlisting the cooperation of parents, Parent-Teacher Associations, and community groups in promoting activities and projects that foster and recognize students' voluntary reading. Many local and national businesses sponsor programs to promote reading. Investigate these programs and involve your students in those that you find appropriate.

RECOMMENDED READING

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Printing and distribution of this booklet has been partially funded by Children's Press; Crown Publishers; Field Publications; Franklin Watts, Inc.; Grolier Publishing Group; Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.; Holiday House, Inc.; Houghton Mifflin Company; MacMillan, Inc.; William Morrow & Company, Inc.; Orchard Books; Scholastic, Inc.; and Silver Burdett and Ginn.

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Lines, Kathleen, ed. (1961). *The Faber storybook*. London: Faber and Faber.

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